

CONTACT:

BEWARE OF HAZARDS HIDING IN YOUR HOME

The miracles of modern convenience often come with a harmful side effect: toxicity. Chemicals that kill crabgrass, remove rust, dissolve paint – even electronic devices and some building materials – can make us sick if we toss them out carelessly.

The Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection (MassDEP) has some tips to prevent us from poisoning our planet with these toxic materials.

Be careful what you buy. Choose the least toxic product to get the job done. Simple soapy water cleans most surfaces. Latex paint is easier to work with and dispose of than oil-based paint. If you buy too much, you can just dry it up and put it in the trash. Oil-based paints and thinners are flammable, the fumes can make you sick, and they need to be taken to your town's paint shed or household hazardous product (HHP) collection for proper disposal. Also, electronic thermostats are a safer and more versatile choice than non-electronic models, which contain mercury and should be disposed of separately.

Don't go for the bulk bargain. Proper disposal of excess hazardous products can cost more than what you paid for them, and improper dumping can harm people, wildlife and the environment.

Weigh the choices. Some products may have other virtues that outweigh their toxicity. Fluorescent lights contain small amounts of mercury, but save large amounts of energy. So buy them, then recycle them at your town's recycling center or HHP collection, along with your outdated thermostats and thermometers. Rechargeable batteries contain cadmium, another toxic heavy metal. But they, too, save energy and can be safely recycled. Their alkaline counterparts are not toxic, but they only deliver two percent of the energy required to make them, and they weigh down your trash.

Throwing it away doesn't mean it goes away. What you put in your trash or down your drain can end up in the air you breathe, the water you drink, or on a sanitation worker's

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face. Solvents, pesticides, pool chemicals, automotive fluids, caustic cleaners, and toxic metals like mercury and cadmium are just some of the hazards that may be hiding in your house. Most towns provide safe ways to dispose of them, and some will even trade you a digital thermometer for your mercury model through a program run by American Ref-Fuel.

Massachusetts cities and towns coordinate collection events open to area residents each year. If you're not sure what to do with your household hazardous products, check with your Board of Health or go to www.earth911.org.

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